

## **17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Luke 15:1-10)**

**11/9/16**

***“Jesus, atoms and our body...”***

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Many private schools today belong to the IEB, this stands for the Independent Examination Board. Whilst schools within the country are compelled to teach the national curriculum as dictated by the Department of Education, private schools may choose to set their own assessment standards which include examinations and moderation. So, one wintry Thursday afternoon I found myself sitting on a Boeing 737 heading for Johannesburg in order to assist with the marking of some 4000 Gr 7 scripts that were written nationally as a benchmark assessment preparing intermediate phase students for high school.

Whilst one of my goals in my life is to do my private pilot's licence before I die, I remain, ironically, a nervous flyer. Thankfully, this time the aircraft was largely empty and I positioned myself in rear far away from everyone else and pretended that all was well! My eye caught the corner of an in-flight magazine in the chair pocket in front of me and I decide to flick through the pages in order to alleviate the stressful thoughts of what to do should both engines flame out for some weird reason.

My eyes stumbled across a paragraph of some editorial that literally took my breath away as I realised the impact this would have on Christians... I was so excited that I immediately took my phone out and photographed the relevant page...

It read as follows...

***“The very small***

***At least a billion of the atoms in your body once belonged to every other human being who ever lived- and a good few dinosaurs...”***

These few words blew me away as I reflected upon their significance.

I have not yet fully digested or understood the theological implications of this statement based on science, but I do understand that this actually means that the chances are in fact possible, that you and I sitting here right now, in this church, in Rondebosch, in 2016, may very well possibly have some of the atoms in our body that once belonged to Jesus!

Reflect on this for a moment...

This is a powerful thought.

You see, I began to realise a few implications of this for us as Christians...

Firstly, Jesus is always in us. It's simple. He is physically part of our bodies... the scientists have already explained this to us in terms of shared atoms passed down through the ages. It is our choice and decision to acknowledge Him as being part of our body and our life. So, in a way, should we reject Jesus, it is almost as if we have an auto-immune disease where we are fighting a battle against ourselves, because Jesus is already part of our body!

Secondly, we have a choice to grow the atoms of Jesus in us. How would we do this? By growing spiritually with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. In essence, Jesus planted a seed within us all, an atom seed that was once part of His earthly body. It is our conscious choice whether or not we choose to water and nurture the seed that was gifted to us.

Some people spend their lives growing spiritually; open to the spirit of God's love. These people are growing and nurturing the seed that Jesus gave them. Some people choose to ignore the seed of life and instead follow the ways of the world. Eventually, their seed may go into hibernation. The beauty about the atoms of Jesus, or seeds of Jesus planted within us, is that at any stage in our lives, should we wish so, we are able to water the atoms of Jesus within our soul and grow in the faith. This is reflective of the forgiveness of Jesus and His ability to always welcome back the lost...

Thirdly, traditional Catholic theology would triumph in the concept of the atoms of Jesus being passed down through the ages. Traditional Catholic theology believes in the idea of Apostolic Succession. Put simply, this means that they believe there is an unbroken line of succession that can be traced from Jesus, through His disciples, down to the Popes, Bishops, Priests and

Deacons of the Church of God. The tricky part of this theology is that the Apostolic Succession only works via the male lineage, thus most Catholics and like-minded believers struggle to submit to the authority of an ordained female cleric. Logically speaking, I am fairly sure that the atoms of Jesus, passed down through the ages don't always exclude females... but this is a debate for another day!

Fourthly, a concern may be raised in the idea of communion, for if Jesus is already physically part of us through shared atoms, then why do we need to still participate in the consecrated Body and Blood of Jesus? This is a good question and would be best left to highly qualified theologians who are in a better position than me to answer. What I can say quite safely, is that when we participate in the communion, we are taking part in a shared Christian experience that reminds us of the covenant we have with God through Jesus... in effect we are nurturing that same seed of Jesus that we spoke about earlier. By partaking in the Eucharist we affirm our faith in Jesus and He likewise, nurtures us both physically and spiritually. The atom seed is there. We choose to grow it by regularly participating in the Eucharist.

In today's Gospel, we are reminded of the famous Parable of the Lost Sheep. Much has been said about this parable over the years and the meanings that it could have for us as Christians in the modern world. Perhaps, today, we can reflect upon this parable in a slightly different way?

When a person is "lost" to Christ, as in the lost sheep, they still carry Christ within them. They have not "lost" Jesus, they merely choose not to nurture and water the atom/seed of Jesus within them. In essence, they carry the seed of Jesus within them.

This idea has some powerful implications for both the lost sheep and for you and me representing the Body of Christ.

Firstly, the person running away from Jesus, the church and often, themselves, can never run away far enough from the love of Jesus. This is actually because, people don't always understand or realise that Jesus is part of them! Wherever they run to, no matter how far away, they take both themselves and Jesus with them.

Secondly, just like the auto-immune disease I mentioned earlier, if we as the Body of Christ reject those who wish to return to the fold, then we are in fact rejecting ourselves, for Jesus is part of those people who are lost too and now are found.

This is a powerful concept to appreciate and understand. The implications for us as Christians are enormous, for this idea implies that we are called to love everybody, all the time. Talk about a challenge from Jesus!

Is this possible?

Good question.

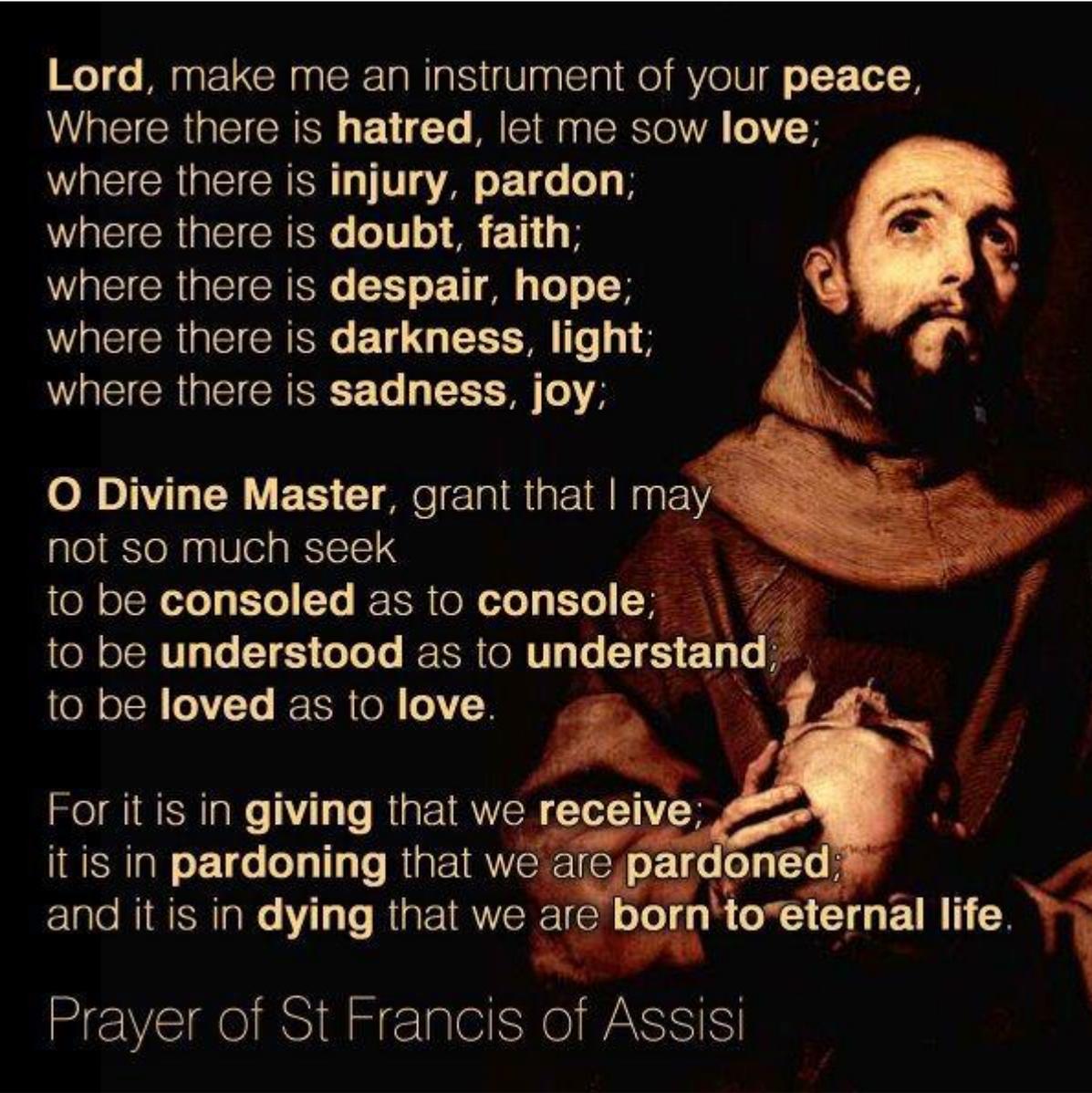
In all our frailty and brokenness, as Christians, we often struggle to relate to people who are different to us. We find safety and comfort in what is familiar and known to us. Reflect for a moment on the current issues in our own country, South Africa, with regards to the continuing purported racism in schools... we as a country have a long way to go in order to unpack the misunderstandings built up over generations.

Jesus calls us to love everyone all the time.

This is perhaps one of the greatest challenges of all times. For, if we look around us the world remains largely at war... different cultures, different religions, different political ideologies... thus being a Christian practicing and sharing the Light of Christ in a fallen world is not always easy...

But we all need to start somewhere... and that somewhere is the person you find yourself sitting next to this morning, your family, the people you work with, the people you come into contact with every day. Are you always passing on the torch of Jesus to the people you meet? Do you make a difference to someone's life every day? And I don't only mean making a difference to the lives of those you love; I also mean do you make a difference to the life of a stranger every day? This is hard. This is a challenge. This is ultimately what we are called to do as real Christians living in the real world: make a difference.

I am reminded of the beautiful words written by St Francis of Assisi. No one has ever said it better than him:



**Lord**, make me an instrument of your **peace**,  
Where there is **hatred**, let me sow **love**;  
where there is **injury, pardon**;  
where there is **doubt, faith**;  
where there is **despair, hope**;  
where there is **darkness, light**;  
where there is **sadness, joy**;

**O Divine Master**, grant that I may  
not so much seek  
to be **consoled** as to **console**;  
to be **understood** as to **understand**;  
to be **loved** as to **love**.

For it is in **giving** that we **receive**;  
it is in **pardoning** that we are **pardoned**;  
and it is in **dying** that we are **born to eternal life**.

Prayer of St Francis of Assisi

Are you nurturing your atom seed of Jesus in your body every day?

Are you always striving to make a difference in someone's life?

May God bless you in this week ahead as you focus on sharing the Light of Jesus in a troubled world.

Amen.